

Once Upon A Ballet™

DANCE CURRICULUM

Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 (ages 3 to 4)

Please note that this curriculum provides guidelines for what students learn throughout the year. They should not all be expected to complete all steps at the beginning of the year. Rather, these guidelines cover what students should have a solid grasp of by the end of the Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 level, before they move on to Once Upon A Ballet Level 2. Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 is designed primarily for early preschoolers while Once Upon A Ballet Level 2 is designed for pre-kindergarteners.

BASIC CONCEPTS

The attention span of 3 and 4 year olds is quite short. However, both their attention and communication skills are developing rapidly at this age. Their emotional and physical skills are developing quickly as well. For many in this age group, this may be their first classroom experience away from mom and/or dad or their first classroom experience entirely. They are learning classroom expectations, how to follow directions, and how to share and take turns. They are also learning basic physical coordination through movements such as running, jumping and turning.

For Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 classes, we recommend 30-35 minutes once a week.

CIRCLE TIME

In Once Upon A Ballet Level 1, circle time exercises should be introduced through games, imaginative activities, and directed play.

Little Circle / Big Circle

Holding hands, students should be able to follow the teacher's direction to make a little circle then a big circle. Students may need to be reminded to keep their circle in the center of the room. This activity helps to set up circle time. It also helps students with the concept of size (little vs. big) and spatial awareness (creating a circle--a shape--in the center of the room).

Flex and Pointe

In a seated position with the legs stretched straight in front of them, students should be able to flex and point their feet while moving through their ankle joint. For Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students, hands may be placed on the floor to help students keep a straight back, unless a port de bras is incorporated. In this age group, students do not need to focus on going through the demi pointe. In addition, it may be difficult for many students at this age to sit up with their backs entirely straight. Including this exercise in class each week will help them develop strength and flexibility in the backs, as well as their feet and ankles. Flex and point combinations may point both feet together at the same time, alternate feet, or include some fun with tickling and wiggling the toes.

Hide and Seek

Students should begin sitting tall with their legs and feet stretched straight in front of them and their arms in second position. They should curl into a ball, pulling their knees to their chest and wrapping their arms around their legs. They should then sit back up tall, with their legs and feet stretched straight in front of them and their arms in second position. This exercise strengthens the abdominal and back muscles. It can also reinforce the dance concept of dynamics when done in either a slow, fluid motion or a quick, sharp motion.

Butterfly Stretch

Students should be able to sit in a butterfly position, with the soles of their feet together and knees out. For this age group, emphasis should not be placed on the amount of stretch. This position will help to open the hips for future turnout, but should not be forced. It will build strength and flexibility in the back as students sit up straight. It will also build strength in their torso as they rock side to side as they "fly". Please note that bouncing is no longer an accepted method of stretching. Do not have students bounce their knees up and down to "fly".

Port de Bras

In a standing or criss-cross, seated position, dancers should be able to move their arms in both quick, sharp movements and slower, fluid movements using imaginative scenarios such as picking flowers, picking stars from the sky, or shooting stars or fireworks.

Clapping and Rhythm

While sitting in a criss-cross position during circle time, is an excellent time to work on musicality and rhythm with activities that involve clapping and/or simple musical instruments (like tambourines, shakers, and rhythm sticks).

Flying Fairies

Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students should be able to lay on their tummies, raise their arms and legs a couple of inches off the floor, and hold the position with their arms and legs stretched long. Their faces should be lifted just off the floor as well, but still facing the floor.

Mermaid Stretch

For a gentle back stretch, Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students should be able to lay on their tummies with their legs stretched straight on the floor behind them, and raise themselves up on their elbows. They should be able to turn their head from side to side while in this position. We do not recommend a full "cobra" position at this age because students do not yet have the cognitive ability and body awareness needed to perform the full stretch correctly, with the shoulders down and the tummy engaged to protect the lower back. This version of the mermaid stretch engages the upper back, helping to develop correct ballet poise and posture.

CENTRE BARRE

For this age group, we do not recommend using an actual barre. The steps and combinations are not so difficult and complex that a barre is needed. Centre barre helps students develop better posture and balance early on. Students are also not tempted to hang on the barre like a jungle gym or gymnastics barre. In fact, if you have a classroom in which you only teach up through age 6, we recommend leaving the barres out of the room in order to take the temptation of hanging on the barre out completely. For Once Upon A Ballet Level 1, much of center barre exercises should be done as games and imaginative activities. For Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students, we suggest staying in a circle for centre barre.

Posture

At this age, posture will be something students work on during Centre Barre and other portions of class. Students should be able to stand tall, with their necks long and heads held high. An effective image to give students is that they are wearing beautiful tiaras and necklaces. Ask them how they would stand to show off their tiaras and necklaces and they will almost always stand tall and correct their posture. Ask them to show off a beautiful pair of earrings and they will almost always drop their shoulders.

Feet Positions

Students should remain in parallel during all of center barre and most of ballet class throughout the year. If students display correct natural turnout (for example, sometimes students will naturally turn out in an exercise such as sways or side gallops), don't discourage it. First and second positions should be introduced at this age group, but only as positions in which to stand. The amount of turn out for this age group should be a "slight V", around 45 degrees.

One exception: if you have an older Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 class (in which most students are 4 years old), please use your best judgement for when your class is ready for using turnout during exercises. Even a "slight V" can be difficult for students at this age. It requires a lot of strength and body awareness for this age group to be able to use even a small amount of turnout correctly.

Parallel position should be with the legs, ankles and feet together. Keeping the legs together will help strengthen the inner thighs, which will help students develop the strength needed for proper turnout.

Arm Positions

When standing with the hands on the hips, the thumbs should be at the back of the waist and the other four fingers should be at the front of the waist. Elbows should be directly side. This encourages the students to stand with a straight back. If the elbows fall to the back (most common) or front, students are either unnecessarily arching their backs or slumping forward. Hands will be placed on the hips or shoulders during most of centre barre at this age. "Fairy arms" or "fairy wings" (where the hands are placed on the shoulders and the elbows are directly side, think of the slave's variation in *Le Corsaire*) and 5th position are often used during rises and turns. Demi seconde may also be used, although usually during traveling exercises. When skirts are worn, they may be held so that the arms are in a demi seconde position. Skirts should be held between the thumb and middle finger to promote the correct shape of the hands for ballet. Elbows should face directly side in this position. En bas, 1st, 2nd and 5th positions are often only used during port de bras exercises. Other positions are not yet introduced in this level. High and low V arms are also incorporated, most often in "fairy" port de bras.

Plié

Students should be able to do a simple demi plié. Three year olds should be expected to be able to demi plié in parallel while keeping their heels on the floor, knees together, backs straight, and elbows directly side with the hands on the hips.

Battement Tendu

Three year olds should be able to tendu to the front in parallel with correct posture. Hands should be on the hips or shoulders ("fairy wing" arms).

Relevé and Bourrée Turn

Students should be able to rise in parallel with "fairy wing" arms on the shoulders and perform a simple bourrée turn in parallel with the arms remaining on the shoulders or moving to 5th position during the turn. Emphasis on proper posture and form should be placed on the rises for Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students. The legs and ankles should remain together. At this age, the purpose of a bourrée turn (which we often refer to as a "twirl") is more for fostering the joy of movement. Most students do not know their right from their left yet in this age group, but still turn to each side when presenting the movement.

Battement Piqué

The main purpose of battement piqué in Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 (also called "fairy taps or princess taps" for this age group) is balance. This step should be performed in parallel, with the hands on the hips or shoulders. Introduce it as a tendu front from parallel, "tap" (piqué), and close. Progressively add "taps" throughout the year until the step would be tendu, "tap" 6 times, close. Students do not need to know the term "piqué" at either level. This ballet vocabulary term will be introduced in Once Upon A Ballet Level 2.

Passé

Passe should be done in parallel with the hands on the hips. We recommend holding the hands on the hips and not the shoulders when performing passé to help keep the hips level. The big toe of the lifted leg should "kiss" the side of the knee of the standing leg. We often call these "stork passés" or "flamingo passés", depending on the current month's theme.

CENTRE

We recommend students learn jumps with "fairy wing" arms on the shoulders in order to strengthen the back and torso and improve posture while jumping.

Sways

Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students should be able to sway from side to side in parallel. Using props such as scarves or fairy wands can help students in this age group with the motion of sways. We don't generally introduce a chassé into the sways combination (sway, sway, chasse, sway) until Once Upon A Ballet Level 2, but this may be added in an older Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 class.

Sautés

Students should be able to do a simple sauté in parallel, keeping the legs together while in the air. Students who have been introduced to pliés in 1st and 2nd positions (in parallel) should also be introduced to sautés in 1st and 2nd positions (in parallel). At this level, regardless of the position, sautés should most often be done as plié-jump-plié-stretch, plié-jump-plié-stretch, etc. This helps the students better develop proper turnout and posture.

Échappés

Once students have been introduced to sautés, they may also be introduced to échappés in parallel. When teaching students to échappé, we recommend doing so similar to sautés: plié / jump / land in 2nd position plié / stretch / plié / jump / land in 1st position plié / stretch.

Combination Jumps

Once students have grasped the single sauté and échappé, simple combinations may be used. Incorporating clapping and simple musical instruments (like tambourines, shakers, and rhythm sticks) to develop rhythm is encouraged.

TRAVELING STEPS

Setting up an obstacle course or using props such as mats are very effective ways for Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students to complete traveling steps in centre. Students should also be able to travel straight across the floor. Hands may be placed on the hips or shoulders, or arms may be in demi seconde or holding the skirt.

Animals

Traveling across the room by imitating different animals is obviously not a ballet step. However, by moving like different animals, students gain strength and flexibility that prepares them for "real" ballet steps later. Frog jumps strengthen the hamstrings, which is important for grand allegro later on. Bunny hops strengthen the feet, ankles and calves, which is important for pointework and petit allegro later on. Snake slithers strengthen the back. Crab walks strengthen the torso, glutes and arms. Bird runs incorporate port de bras with a traveling movement while strengthening the ankles.

Proud Walks

Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students should be able to walk with correct ballet posture by standing tall and proud as they walk. The student's chin should be lifted. It should not be dropped so that the student is looking at her feet.

Walks (at different levels)

Students should be able to walk at low, medium, and high levels.

Runs (en demi pointe)

We most often use the term "fairy runs", however we also frequently use the images of "ballerina runs", "butterfly runs", "bird runs", and "bumble bee runs", depending on the current class theme. Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 students should run as high as they can on demi pointe (as if they are wearing mom's high heels, not as if they are wearing pointe shoes and en pointe). Demi pointe may be closer to quarter or half pointe (rather than a $\frac{3}{4}$ pointe) at this age. Arms will vary depending on the theme of the run.

Stork Walks

Stork walks should be done in parallel. Students should step, stork pose, step, stork pose, etc. Stork walks help students with keeping their knees high in marches. (While stork walks are essentially the same movement as marches, the accent is placed on lifting the knee rather than stepping down). Students may be asked to have their big toe "kiss" their knee with each step. Stork walks help with pointing the toes before stepping in ballerina walks. They also help with skips (because skips are basically stork walks with a hop). For an older Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 class, for add difficulty, stork walks may be done en demi pointe. Hands may be placed on the hips or shoulders, or arms may be in demi seconde. Stork walks may also be referred to as flamingo walks.

Marches

Similar to stork walks, marches should be done in parallel, going through the parallel passé position. Marches should be done with a stronger accent on the step down. They are also generally done more quickly than stork walks. Hands are usually placed on the hips for marches.

Walking (sideways)

Students should be able to walk sideways in parallel (step-close, step-close, etc.). Walking sideways is a precursor to sideways gallops.

Gallops (sideways)

Gallops should be done from side to side, in parallel. Hands may be placed on the hips or shoulders, or arms may be in demi seconde.

Hop Scotch

Students should be able to hop from two feet, to one foot, to two feet, to one foot, etc. Hopscotch is a precursor to skipping, which is basically hops from one foot to the other foot.

Skips (forward)

Skips are a very difficult step for many students at this age. Skips will likely not be introduced until the end of the academic year of an Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 class. For classes/students who have difficulty with skips, we recommend giving plenty of practice with stork walks, marches, and hopscotch. Breaking down the skip as step-stork pose-hop, step-stork pose-hop, may also be helpful to students. Holding a student's hand and slowly skipping with them while saying "step, stork pose, hop!" and progressing to "step, hop!" can also be helpful to students as they can see, hear and feel the step with their teacher beside them.

Pony Prances

Pony prances are parallel emboites in low attitude devant. This step will likely be too difficult for most 3 year olds, but we've included it for the older Once Upon A Ballet Level 1 class (if students are ready by the end of the academic year).

STORY DANCING**Story Dancing**

Story dancing is important in that it helps to prepare students for performing. Each month, students should learn a short dance that incorporates the steps they are currently working on in class. The dance should tell a story. We recommend this being a dance the students show parents during parent observation time. In this age group, we recommend the teacher and/or assistants perform the dance with the students.

FREE DANCING**Free Dancing**

Free dancing is important for several reasons. Because students at this level have such short attention spans, adding several free dancing activities throughout the class can break up the more structured exercises that require more focus. In addition, it is important in the development of expression and creativity. Additional concepts can be incorporated into free dancing, such as musicality, dynamics, spatial awareness, and shapes. Other steps students are learning, such as skips, gallops, walks and runs, can also be incorporated into free dancing. We like to include a free dancing activity at the beginning of class to help students get excited about ballet class, as well as get some of their wiggles out.

REVERENCE**Port de Bras**

Students should be able to stand in parallel and complete a simple 1st and 2nd port de bras. We consider 1st port de bras to be bringing the arms from en bas, to 1st position, to 2nd position, to en bas. We consider 2nd port de bras to be bringing the arms from en bas, to 1st position, to 5th position, opening to 2nd position, to en bas. At this age, the purpose of learning port de bras is to learn the arm positions and to have good posture. It is difficult for this age group to really grasp the correct shape of the hands and the quality of the arm movements.

Curtsy or Bow

For a "curtsy" at this age group, we recommend a simple demi pli   in parallel with a slight bow of the head. Arms are in demi seconde. This keeps the curtsy simple and clean for this age group. For a bow, we recommend a slight bend at the hips while standing in parallel with the hands on the hips.